



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Adoptive parents take steps to new beginning Awareness, confronting needs important

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

Each adoption means a new start for a child.

Last week, eight families in Washtenaw County created such a beginning.

Adults finalized their commitment on Nov. 22, on the occasion of the third annual Michigan Adoption Day at Washtenaw County Circuit Court.

Parents took the big step - the deep decision to bring a child into their home and their hearts. In 39 other Michigan counties that day, about 270 other adoptions took place in the largest event of its kind in the country.

The benefits of adoption are widely recognized but perhaps too easily forgotten by the public. The number of adoptions in the county declined from 262 in 2002 to 160 in 2003 and 107 last year. But for this year, county adoption specialist Monica Ireland-Hicks pointed to a rebound when she forecast 120 adoptions.

To the state Department of Human Services, which tracks the numbers and runs many of the programs, children who are in foster care may have needs that make finding a good adoptive home especially challenging. They may be older children who belong to a racial or ethnic minority, have siblings also needing adoption, or face various impairments.

Awareness is the first step.

The state's Adoption Services Program has been a go-between, helping children whose biological parents have lost their rights because of child abuse or neglect, and assisting families who want to adopt.

Learning a child's profile may be the second step.

The state program notes that children who are permanent state wards often have social or psychological needs. They may be apprehensive about accepting adoptive placement. To ease the difficulties, Human Services officials say they are seeking to develop ways to assist families after an adoption.

Statewide, 2,684 adoptions were finalized in 2004 through DHS and private agencies, about 200 more than in 2003. A relative or foster parent accounted for 93 percent of the adoptions last year.

Everyone agrees that the need is great. The Children's Defense Fund, a child advocacy group, reported in January that more than 7,000 children were awaiting adoption in Michigan.

But the statistics can improve with each parental commitment. One step at a time.

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